

Devising the Counties Ride

Towards the end of 2008 I started looking at different rides in the UK which could be gathered together and possibly approved as IBA rides. One of these was a ride which involved visiting all the counties of England. This seemed like it should be a simple plan. The initial questions I thought would need answering were: how would you provide evidence of visiting all counties and what timeframe would the ride need to be completed in to fulfil IBA requirements?

Once I started looking at this the first problem I came up with was what list of counties would I use? I am sure we all think we can name most of the counties of England, but I came up with several lists which included anything from 39 to 81 names. Currently in England there are at least four different types of county - there are metropolitan counties (e.g. Greater Manchester), two-tier counties (e.g. Kent), and unitary counties (e.g. Telford & Wrekin). In addition there are ceremonial counties - most, but not all, of the two-tier counties are also ceremonial counties, as are some of the unitary counties.

I did look at the counties of Wales and Scotland as well - there are 13 counties in Wales and 34 in Scotland. To include all these may be possible in future but I thought it best to stick just with England for now!

I decided that the purpose of this ride should be to travel through as much of the English countryside so concluded that this should preclude the metropolitan counties and many of the unitary authorities, but rather include the traditional shires of England. This meant a fifth list, that of historic counties. Most of the county reorganisation took place in 1974 so I thought that would be a way of finding a list. Even that brought up issues - did that mean I should include Salop instead of Shropshire - some historic lists include Monmouthshire, which is in Wales, but was an English county at some time in its history - what about Sussex (one ceremonial county but two county councils since 1888) or the different ridings of Yorkshire (there are four, three are two-tier counties, one is a unitary authority). I eventually came up with a list of 39 historic counties, but that didn't seem a very satisfactory number so decided I would split Sussex and include both halves separately, to make a total of 40 counties.

The next step was to decide where to visit. Options included taking a photograph of the county sign or getting a receipt. I decided against the former

because it is difficult to identify where these will be, and therefore difficult to plan for, also it is often not safe to stop and photograph these. Receipts are problematic, although some would be necessary to satisfy IBA requirements, the county you are in is not often, or regularly, identified on receipts. So I set about finding somewhere in each county which could be photographed. It seemed to make sense for these locations to be in each county town, and as far as possible to have historical importance for that town. So my next job was to identify the county town for each county. Again this was not as simple as I had anticipated!

Most counties were no problem - e.g. Chester is, and always has been the county town of Cheshire. But there were several problems - some counties have a different county town now from that they had traditionally - e.g. Derbyshire - its county town was Derby, but its administrative centre is now Matlock, and Derby is a separate unitary authority. Then one county, Wiltshire, never had a county town by any of the set definitions, although Trowbridge or Wilton could lay claim to the title, and Middlesex had four possible county towns - Brentford, Clerkenwell, Westminster or the City of London. The traditional county town of one county, Berkshire is now no longer in Berkshire but in Oxfordshire!

Eventually I came up with the following list of 40 counties and county towns:

Bedfordshire (Bedford); Berkshire (Abingdon); Buckinghamshire (Buckingham); Cambridgeshire (Cambridge); Cheshire (Chester); Cornwall (Truro); Cumberland (Carlisle); Derbyshire (Derby); Devon (Exeter); Dorset (Dorchester); County Durham (Durham); East Sussex (Lewes); Essex (Chelmsford); Gloucestershire (Gloucester); Hampshire (Winchester); Herefordshire (Hereford); Hertfordshire (Hertford); Huntingdonshire (Huntingdon); Kent (Maidstone); Lancashire (Lancaster); Leicestershire (Leicester); Lincolnshire (Lincoln); Middlesex (Brentford); Norfolk (Norwich); Northamptonshire (Northampton); Northumberland (Alnwick); Nottinghamshire (Nottingham); Oxfordshire (Oxford); Rutland (Oakham); Shropshire (Shrewsbury); Somerset (Taunton); Staffordshire (Stafford); Suffolk (Ipswich); Surrey (Guildford); Sussex (Chichester); Warwickshire (Warwick); Westmorland (Appleby); Wiltshire (Trowbridge); Worcestershire (Worcester); Yorkshire (York)

I then searched for details of each county town and found a specific historic building of importance in each town - such as a castle, cathedral, shire hall or

similar building. It only remained for me to put together a ride book for the ride, detailing the location of each building which had to be photographed, with a map and picture of each one. I then calculated different routes using Microsoft Autoroute and put my proposal to IBA UK with a question about what evidence would be required to gain accreditation for the ride.

It has been decided that to complete the ride and gain IBA recognition the rider can start from anywhere and visit the counties in any order, but will have to:

- complete a circular ride, starting and finishing at the same point in England;
- photograph all locations, with a ride flag and rider's bike in each picture;
- obtain receipts at 6 corners - Maidstone; Truro; Chester; Carlisle; Alnwick; Norwich;
- complete the ride within 48 hours (36 hours for a Gold ride).

I hope to complete the first test running of this ride in the near future and then make the ride book available for other riders to enjoy the ride.

Addendum

I completed the ride within 36 hours in July 2009 but to date (June 2012) it has not been recognised by IBA UK, nor been repeated by any other rider.